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SUTTON·COLD·FIELD
TOWN·AND·CHASE



WITH MAPS AND
MANY PICTURES
BY W. MIDDLETON

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SUTTON COLDFIELD TOWN & CHASE.

PRINTED BY THE MIDLAND COUNTIES HERALD LIMITED,
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Beautiful Sutton,
Wast thou not cradled
Far in the forest
Beneath the hill cliff?

A SHORT HISTORY OF
THE TOWN AND CHASE
OF SUTTON COLDFIELD
WITH TWO MAPS AND
MANY PICTURES
BY W. MIDGLEY, A.R.C.A.



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Bracebridge Brook.

Sutton Coldfield Town and Chase.

CHAPTER I.

SUTTON BEFORE THE CONQUEST.

IT is a railway journey of fourteen minutes from Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield, and five minutes from the railway station are the gates of the Park. Of the thousands of dwellers in the great city who have been to Sutton, how many, one wonders, conceive what a wonderful "section" of English history lies here almost at their doors.

Far back in the dim days of the early Heptarchy the kings of Mercia, from their palace at Tamworth, set apart the forest of Sutton for their hunting ground,

and the park is just a little bit of that forest that remains. And long before the days of the Mercian kings, before the Beormings had built their little hamlet on the Rea, perhaps before Cæsar had discovered the strange people who stained their bodies with



The Ancient Encampment.

woad, some warring Celtic tribes on this wild upland had scooped out, with their rude bronze mattocks, earth-works from behind which they could shoot their arrows. And here they remain to this day, untouched by the plough, levelled a little by the hundreds of winters, and with old oaks growing on them here and there, but clearly to be traced even now in Sutton Park.

The dyke which crosses the carriage road to Streetly, just past the "Keeper's Well," and runs across the valley and through the opposite wood has sometimes been considered one of these. Another surrounds the foot of the tree-crowned hill above Blackroot marsh, and the crest of the hill is scored all over with old entrenchments. What pictures of wild battle do these overgrown dykes suggest! What skin-clad barbarians fighting with strange weapons in peaceful-looking Sutton!

And there are many other traces of the ancient Britons in and near Sutton Park. Maney has been derived from the British *maini*, the stones. A large Druidical stone was found there in 1853. The name of Rowton Well may have been derived from the British *Rah din*,¹ the camp on the hill, and a tumulus on a hill near the well was opened by the Sutton Corporation in 1859 and proved to be artificial. Barr Beacon, two miles west of the park, is supposed to have been a Druidical shrine. A curious sacrificial bowl has been found there. Aldridge, two miles to the north, was an "old ryke," or dwelling place, when the Saxons found it, and there is a tumulus near the church. The King's Standing mound, near Banner's Gate Lodge, was a British tumulus. A larger tumulus is in Bourne Vale Wood, near Streetly. Lastly, at Stonnall, two miles from Aldridge, when a tumulus was opened there in 1824, there was a great find of bronze swords, spear heads, celts, and other British implements.

(1) "*Rohedin*," says Mr. Joseph Hill, "the earliest form of Rowton in early deeds, is a very long way towards *Rah din*."

But although the diggers of all these earthworks scored their mark across the heath of Sutton they left no written witness of their names. It was not till Cæsar brought his legions to Britain, and sent back his wonderful reports to the Roman Senate, that the recorded history of our land began. Of that Roman occupation there are some most remarkable remains in Sutton Park.

For five hundred years Britain was an important and prosperous colony of the Romans, and those mighty builders dotted all over the country their cities and forts, their "casters" and "chesters," built their great boundary walls across the land, and above all made those great highways—roads which all led to Rome—through the forests and marshlands, and over the rivers and mountains. One of them ran from Dover to Wales (Gatheli, Celt or Watling Street), another from Totness to Lincoln (the Fosseway) and there were many others. From the Fosseway there branched on the Cotswolds a road running through Derby towards Newcastle. It was one of the Ickniel Streets, so called, perhaps, from the British tribe the Iceni, through or near whose country they ran.

Now two of these great roads, Ickniel Street and Watling Street, crossed each other four or five miles north of Sutton Park, where there was a great fort called Etocetum, and where there are now two little hamlets—one called Chesterfield (the field of the camp) and the other Wall.

Many centuries have passed since this was a walled

town, but even yet a trace of its greatness may be seen in the masses of rough rubble masonry set in the hard Roman cement, which crop up here and there in the meadow at the back of the church. And many relics of



Blackroot Marsh.

the old fort have been dug up and are placed in the museum at Lichfield. Fragments of Samian ware and tessellated pavement are there, tiles (all stamped with the Roman letters, P.S.), coins, scrapers, a curious but

elegantly moulded column base, and a massive piece of lead piping with the rough seam along the top such as one sees in every museum in Italy, and many more interesting remains of Roman Britain would be found if the site were excavated.

There is a street in Birmingham, a little section of the great road, still called Icknield Street, but the traffic of the world long ago deserted the road between Birmingham and Wall, the ploughs filled up the ditches and levelled the ridge, and only a memory of it remained here and there, as a boundary line between the old counties of Stafford and Warwick. Only a memory except in Sutton Park, where there can still be seen a mile and a half of one of the most perfect examples of a Roman highway left in Britain.

It enters the Park near the Royal Oak Inn, and leaves it at Streetly (the field on the Street), overgrown with gorse and ling but straight as a line, sixty feet across, arched in the middle and with ditches on either side, just as it was left by the Roman legionary seventeen hundred years ago.

A little putting-green has been formed on the surface of the road by the Golf Club at Streetly, where the heather has been cleared away, and the perfect arch of the street covered with smooth turf. Here one may stand and see the road stretching across the heath as far as the eye can reach, and imagine it again as the great paved imperial highway from the Eternal City to the ends of the known world, busy with the traffic of the tributary Britons, the legions and *impedimenta*, the slaves and the commerce of the "senate and people of Rome."



Icknield Street.

The road is the bank on the left of the flooded ditch. The shape of the road can be seen as it runs over the hill to the right of the little tree.

There is a curious old description of Sutton in 1762 in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of that year, written by a native, who signed himself "Incola,"¹ which contains this passage:—

"The Park furnishes fuel for the poor inhabitants



The Old Peat Pit.

from a vast magazine of peat near the Roman Road, mentioned before, composed of the rotted branches of some thousands of fir trees, cut down by the Romans to enable them to pass over a morass there. The bodies of the trees are some-

(1) Supposed to have been the Rector.

times dug up sound, with the marks of the axe on them, which effectually confutes the opinion of those who suppose they have lain there ever since Noah's deluge."

This old peat pit may still be seen near Rowton's Well. It is a long shallow cutting not unlike a section of a road running towards the Roman street, and affords strong grounds for thinking that "the camp on the hill" was a regular station for the Roman troops on their way to the north, and that Rowton's Well itself was dug by the Romans, in the middle of the little amphitheatre of hills, to supply the camp with water.

But, as we all know, the Roman colony in Britain came to an end in the fifth century. The Roman soldiers were withdrawn for the defence of Italy. The Britons were attacked by the Picts and exterminated by their Saxon allies. Dust began to settle on their ruined cities, a twelfth of an inch or so every year, and the gorse began to grow on Icknield Street.

Tribe after tribe of the English came and fought each other for the land, and formed the seven kingdoms of the Heptarchy, each trying to conquer the other for three hundred years. The kingdom of Mid-England was called Mercia, the country on the "marches" or borders of the British. It was one of the most powerful of the seven, and twice or thrice very nearly succeeded in subduing them all, and ruling a united England from the town adjoining Sutton on the north.

For it was at Tamworth, and afterwards at Kingsbury, or Kingsborough, that the kings of Mercia held their



Rowton's Well.

court. From there the savage Penda struck the last blow for the pagan gods; from there Offa drove back the Britons to the present boundary of Wales, and held them behind his great dyke from Chester to the Wye. And we can dimly see St. Chad, the monk from Lindisfarne, travelling from Lichfield, on foot and unattended, along Watling Street on the edge of Sutton forest, to preach before Wulfere, the son of Penda, the last of the kings to be converted to Christ, in the year 765.

A wild, fierce race were the Angles. When they were not fighting the Britons or the Danes, or each other, their chief delight was the hunting of the wolves and boars, the wild cattle and the deer, in the great forest wastes which surrounded their little towns and homesteads. The Mercian kings set apart for the chase several great preserves—Sherwood Forest, the Forest of Cannock, and a great tract near their gates at Tamworth.

All the country behind the strip of arable land in the Tame Valley to Aston, as far back as Barr Beacon and Weeford, an area of 100 miles, formed one great hunting ground, and in the middle of it, on Maney Hill, seven miles south west of Tamworth, the kings built a hunting lodge called Southtun, on the edge of the Colfield,¹ the waste heath sloping to the north from Barr Beacon. This place is now Sutton Coldfield, and the eight or nine square miles of woods and heath in the

(1) Mr. W. H. Duignan derives *Coldfield* from the British *Col*, the hill—Latin *Collum*. Coldfield would mean *the field on the hillside*.

middle of that "Forest and Chase of Sutton" have been wonderfully preserved to us as Sutton Park, almost the same to day, except for the hideous defilement of the railway, as it was when the yellow-haired English kings hunted the wolf in Hollyhurst, and chased the deer across the heath to Barr or to Lichfield.

Centuries passed and Sutton was still only the home of a few verderers and retainers of the King's house. Egbert, King of the West Saxons, "drew in the petty princedoms under him," and reduced the Mercian kings to the rank of earl. The Danes harried the country as far as Worcester, and sacked Tamworth, and many a poor cottager from the Tame valley and his women-folk hid themselves in Sutton woods. Alfred drove back the Danes, and sent his daughter, Ethelflæda, the Lady of the Marches, and her husband Ethelred to rule for him at Tamworth, and to rebuild the town—their work can still be seen in the foundations of the castle. The battle of Hastings was fought and lost, and the Normans divided our country among them and made the great Domesday Book, the census and detailed description of the land. It is mentioned in it that the woodlands of Sutton extended two miles in length and about one in breadth, not very different to their extent to-day, but then they were all valued at *four pounds*.

At the time of the Domesday a little hamlet had grown up here in the heart of the forest, and there were eight hides of arable land, the holdings of eight families, about eight hundred acres.



Tamworth Castle.

Showing the Saxon mound and the Saxon herring-bone masonry.



Sticking.

CHAPTER II.

SOME NORMAN RECORDS.

SUTTON belonged at the conquest to Edwin, Earl of Mercia, the grandson of Godiva,¹ that fairest woman of mid-English romance. Edwin, struggling to the last for English freedom, was put to death in 1071. Sutton and the forest were

(1) And her noble husband Leofric, St. Edward's counsellor, who would often stay at Sutton on his way from Coventry to his home at Bromley Regis.

seized, and became the private property of the King, along with so very many of the lands of the Saxon nobles. Henry I. exchanged Sutton for two little manors in Rutlandshire with the Norman earls of Warwick, who held for many years the whole Chase¹ of Sutton for their hunting.

And it was held in high esteem, says Dugdale, by those great Earls. Very carefully did they preserve the game, and very jealously did they reserve to themselves the sole right to hunt in this great domain. There are some quaint old records, that have been preserved to us through all these centuries, which tell us of this jealousy, and which give us, by the way, some vivid glimpses of life in those far off days.

It seems that in the beginning of John's reign, 1201, Lord Bassett, a great baron in these parts, made a park, that is, fenced in a part of the waste, on the borders of the chase at Drayton.* Waleran, Earl of Warwick, soon heard of this encroachment on his possessions, and lost no time in resisting it, he "waged law" against him. And rather than pull up his palings or quarrel with his powerful neighbour, Bassett came to an agreement with him. He promised that his foresters should be under the superintendence of the Earl's "woodward," and that

(1) For *chase* it would now be called; only the hunting grounds of the King were called forests. In the 17th year of Edward I., for instance, the Earl of Warwick obtained a special patent of the King that he might have liberty to pursue deer that fled from his chase at Sutton into the King's forest at Kane" (Cannock).

(2) Bassett's Pole was a boundary mark for this old enclosure.

he would not construct a "buck-stall," or trap to catch the deer from the chase ; also for the land that he had enclosed he would pay a tribute to Warwick at "his manor of Sutton of two good bucks from his park, taken between the assumption and the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary—that is to say, of every buck the four limbs and head, with the hide and forket."

A similar quaint tribute or acknowledgment was agreed to on the opposite edge of the chase at Perry Barr, in 25 Edward I., when "John, lord of Little Barre, for license to enclose woods, covenanted to pay yearly to the Earl at Sutton six barbed arrows on the feast of St. Michael."

In 21 Edward I., Warwick even complained to the King of "the misdemeanours committed by certaine lewd persons in killing deer within the chase," and the King sent down a special commission to investigate. If we only had the report of this Royal Commission, what fine tales of Robin Hood, of Nuthurst, and Little John of Ladywood might it not have to tell !

But, perhaps the most interesting of these old records is one relating to the enclosure of a croft on the eastern border of Sutton, near Curdworth. The son of Torquil, the last Saxon Earl, the descendant of the legendary Guy of Warwick, was dispossessed of his estates by the Norman Earl Newburgh. He went to live in the forest, took to himself the name of "de Arden," and became the direct ancestor of Mary Arden, the mother of our greatest

Englishman, who gave us the tale of that other noble who was dispossessed by his brother lord, and went to live in Arden. The children of "de Arden" built themselves a homestead at Peddimore, in Sutton parish, and its curious double moat remains to this



Peddimore Moats

day. In Edward the First's time Peddimore was owned by Thomas de Arden and Roise, his wife, who "began to exercise freedom there, not considering that it was in the compasse of Sutton Chase, where the Earls of Warwick had so much privilege relating both

to Vert and Venison ; so that the Earl having begun suit against him he was glad to seek his favour, and submit to a peaceable agreement with him, by which the said Earl *condescended* to grant him liberty to fish in that little stream called Ebroke¹, as also that they might have liberty to agist Hoggs within their woods at Curdworth and Peddimore, and beat down acorns for their Swine, and likewise gather such Nutts as should be there growing," also liberty to cut wood under the supervision of the lord's forester, but "their woodward should be sworn to carry only a Hatchet or Forest Bill without Bow and Arrows." Also they were granted permission to enclose 20 acres of the waste "according to the custom of the chase, so that Does and their Fawns might leap over the hedges."

If well-to-do freemen like the Ardens had so little liberty on their own land, what must have been the case of the poor villagers, the villeins who fed and clothed by their labour those fine lords and knights? Those were the bad old days when might was right, before Magna Charta was enforced for the poor. Then the feudal lord had absolute power of life and death over his people, and could claim, as, in fact, Earl Warwick actually did at Sutton, a "court Baron with Assize of bread and beer, infangthef², tumbrel³, and gallows."

(1) The Ebrook is the name of the brook which rises in Sutton Park, and flows through the town.

(2) Infangthef—thief within the manor by a tenant.

(3) Tumbrel—the ducking stool.



The Ebrook.

Still it would seem that the Feudal system was never enforced here in the forest with all its harshness. There is a remarkable record still extant relating to the rights of the people of Sutton Chase, which has been considered of much historical importance, as illustrating the life of the people in those distant times. It is the record of an inquiry held at a Court Leet¹ at Sutton, in 1308, when one Anselm de Clifton (of Clifton Hill, one supposes) and eleven other jurymen described "what sort of customs they used to make and to have in this lordship before the coronation of our lord King Henry III., grandfather of the present King, from the days of Athelstan, sometime King of England, by whom aforetime the ancient usages and customs of the lordship were made and settled," and which were confirmed by Waleran, Earl of Warwick, "to last for ever."

It seems to us at first sight "an ancient tale of wrong" when we read that on the death of one of these villeins, or "customary tenants," the lord used to seize for his share at his pleasure a third part of all the tenant's goods. "And the lord used to have in like manner the half of all his goods, saving *oxen enough for ploughing*, and heifers for milking, when his (the lord's) eldest son or daughter was going to be married. And also if any of these tenants went out of the lordship, and would not abide there any longer, they used to come into court and give up into the hands of their lord or his seneschal their tenure of bondage, with all their horses and colts

(1) The King's Court corresponding to our County Court.

and cart bound with iron, and their hogs, their whole pieces of cloth, their unspun wool and their best brass pot ; and go out and abide wherever he would without challenge from his lord and himself with all his posterity to be free for ever."

But it was something in those days that a villein could leave his lord's land even on those hard terms, to be a free man, and not an absolute serf.

Again, the tenants were forced to grind all their corn at the lord's water mill, which stood till the last century at the bottom of Mill Street, or else at the lord's wind-mill on Maney Hill. They were forced, among other things, to repair the mill-pool with earthwork and to drive the wanlass (*i.e.*, beat up the game) whenever the lord came to hunt. And at harvest time they all had to help in the lord's fields, but for this service they were paid "one fat sheep, four pennyworth of white bread, and twelve casks of beer."

On the other hand, they had some rights, as that they could buy and sell freely both in and out of the lordship of Sutton without challenge. And they used to have house-bote and hay-bote—*i.e.*, enough wood to repair their houses and hedges from the woods in the time of Lent—and common pasturage for their cattle, and all the tenants used to have the dead wood in all the woods wherever it might be found for firing, privileges that hold good to this day.

And one notes that there were signs of improvement in the lot of the poor even then, and that the fierce

tyranny of the early Normans was being relaxed. It is mentioned, for instance, that these witnesses "had heard their ancestors say that at the time the manor of Sutton was in the hands of the Kings of England all the chase was afforested, and all the dogs within the forest used to be ringed and maimed on the left paw, but that now they had leave to have dogs of all kinds, whole and not ringed."



House-bote and Hay-bote.



In Arden.



Windley Pool.

CHAPTER III.

THE MANOR HOUSE, THE CHURCH, AND THE FAIRS.

THE Norman Earls of Warwick, says Dugdale, had here "a very goodly manour house, with faire pools near unto it." Two of these pools remain to-day in Windley and Holland pools, and a third, the mill pool, which filled the valley between them as far as the Dam¹, has only been drained in the last century. But of the great house or castle above them hardly a trace remains. The materials were long ago pulled down and carted away. Villas have been built

(1) Now called the Parade.

on part of the site, the railway has been cut through the rest.

But an interesting description of the site as it stood in 1859, by Miss Bracken, in her book, *The Forest and Chase of Sutton*, will help us to realise the extent of this splendid feudal house, perched high on the hill, looking out, across the chain of lakes at its foot, over the woods and heath to Barr Beacon, Shenstone, Corley, Clent, and Dudley.

"The area of these buildings," says Miss Bracken, "is still perfectly traceable. The summit of the hill has an escarpment, which has scarcely been disturbed since Bishop Vesey removed its supporting stone wall. This area is an oval of about one hundred yards in its largest diameter. Foundations supposed to be those of the chapel are on its east side, partly under the present house; and the site of a tower and its dungeon is observed in its north-west corner, from which have recently been dug up some pieces of encaustic tiles, probably remains of the pavement of the chapel. On the north end of the area part of the foundations of the exterior wall have been laid bare. From the flat of the hill south, a road now runs on the west side to the causeway leading between the two ancient pools to the park¹.

"The entrance to the Manor house may have been

(1) From the Driffold, or "drive-fold," where the beasts pastured in the park were driven in winter.

on the east, where there are hollows as if towers had been rooted up, and where there are traces of extended adjoining buildings. There is still a gateway, leading now to nothing, under a farm building of timber, apparently raised upon more



Figure of Angel from Water Orton Bridge.
Built by Bishop Vesey with the stones from the Chapel of the Manor House.

ancient foundations of stone, which may have supported the towers and portcullis protecting the steep eastern ascent, where is seen a widely marked road to this gateway from the pools below. A well is in the rock half way down this road, a deep well is also within the area."

So that this great house covered a space a hundred yards across; there were towers around the walls, a



Twelfth century carved stones in Sutton Churchyard.

Formerly built into one of Vesey's 16th century houses in the High Street, but originally from the Manor House. On another stone from the same place, now built into the Church tower, the supporters to the coat of arms of Henry VII. can be traced. Henry held the Manor House during his reign. The figure between the stag's horns may be a representation of the Vision of St. Hubert, the patron saint of hunters.

fortified gatehouse with portcullis, a stone chapel richly decorated, and dwelling halls and rooms within the walls, as in the Tower of London, but probably half timbered. Truly "a full fair manor and a rich."

But even this great place would be too small for the army of officials and retainers required to control a tract like Sutton Chase, and for the farmers and tradesmen who had to feed them. In the thirteenth century a line of quaint timbered houses had grown down the hillside, and extended over the mill dam and up the opposite hill. For the chapel in the castle, the "free chapel of St. Blaize," was found too small, and a larger church was built on the present site about the year 1290, the first priest whose name is recorded being installed in 1305.¹

And all around the borders of the chase hamlets and villages with churches had been springing up. Middleton,² Curdworth,³ Wishaw, Drayton Bassett, Water Orton, Erdington, Whitacre, Aston, Aldridge, Great Barr and Perry Barr, Canwell (where there was a monastery), Weeford, and Shenstone.

Sutton, standing in the middle, was made in Edward the First's time the market town of this district. "Guy de Beauchamp, in 28 Edward I.," says Dugdale, "obtained a charter for a weekly Mercate here on the

(1) The lower part of the tower of this church still remains.

(2) The "middle town" between Sutton and Tamworth, then the home of the Marmions of Scott's poem. In the church there is a good Norman doorway and a curious leper's squint.

(3) There are some good Norman arches and a fine Norman font.

Tuesday and a Faire yearly to begin on the eve of the Holy Trinity," and another fair was afterwards established in 1353 on St. Martin's Day.

It is difficult for us to realise to day the importance and popularity of these mediæval fairs. When shops



Norman Font, from Whitacre Church

Used for many years as a flower vase by a churchwarden of Sutton, and presented by his son to Sutton Church.

were few and small people bought all their goods for the year at these great local markets, and immense stocks were disposed of during the few days they lasted. Special courts were established on the spot to settle the disputes between the traders, to regulate weights and

measures, and to certify to the purity of the goods sold. These were called Pie-powder Courts, from *pieds poudres*, or dusty feet, in allusion to the pedlars who used them.

The fairs were a source of great profit from tolls to the "lords of the fair," who granted special privileges to the people who attended them. The lords would open the fair in full state followed by a procession of retainers with their banner, and preceded by the bedell or cryer of the "court baron," who would proclaim the "laws of the fair." The laws were such as that "the people must leave their weapons at their homes that ye King's peace may be kept," or that "no brewer sell into the fair a barrel of good ale above two shillings, no long ale, no red ale, no ropye ale, but good and halsome for man's body under ye payne of forfeiture."

The fairs were usually held on the feast days of the local church, as at Sutton, to suit the people who had assembled for their devotions. As an old Chronicle says, "the pepull came to the chirche with candeles brenning and would wake and come with lights to the chirche in their devotions. And after they fell to songs, daunces, harping, piping and alsoe to glotony and sinne, and so turned the holinesse into cursydenesse."

What a picture—the church full of worshippers with "candeles brenning," the graveyard full of the traders.

(1) In a curious history of Sutton by "An Impartial Hand," published in 1760, it is mentioned that in that day it was still the custom for the Warden and Society to "Walk in grand procession with a band of musik and publickly proclaim each fair and the holding of a court of Pie-powder."

minstrels, storytellers, tumblers, each with a little knot around him of quaintly dressed country-people. Outside the churchyard were the booths of the mercers, the vintners, the potters, the cattle dealers, and above all the shows and the miracle-plays, those early melodramas of the people. We can imagine the laughter



Sutton Church.

at the horned and tailed devil on the stage, and see the flags above it, and the band of pipers and guitar players below, or the wonder of the people at the strange beasts that would be sent among them when the "Creation" was staged—the performance which was the origin of the menageries of our modern fairs.

And in and out among the booths we can fancy the boisterous merriment of the games got up by the traders to draw people to the fair—the wrestling, the yawning matches, the quarter-staff playing, the flying dragons, the monstrous fishes, the soaped pigs, the bull-baiting and the bear-baiting.

All happened round our little church at Sutton on Holy Trinity Eve and the three following days, and even now there is a relic of it in the holiday they keep on Trinity Monday and the sports in the rectory grounds. And till 1885 there was a memory even of the lord's procession, when the "Sergeant-at-Mace," in a curious green dress, went to open the fair followed by a procession of old men carrying the pikes and halberds that are still kept at the Town Hall.



Sympathy.



In the Gum Slade.



Little Bracebridge Pool.

CHAPTER IV.

SUTTON UNDER THE EARLS OF WARWICK.

IT is easy to see how closely the fortunes of our feudal village were bound up with those of the great house on which it depended. The Beauchamps, who had obtained the earldom by marriage with the heiress of Earl Newburgh, achieved the flood-mark of their prosperity in the fifteenth century. Those were great days for earls and knights and men-at-arms and archers, the days of Cressy and Agincourt, and Bayard and Joan of Arc, and the red and white roses. And a great

part did the lords of Sutton play in them, and finely were they helped by the yeomen or yewmen of the chase, who had learnt their archery by shooting at Bassett's Budds and Hammon's Budds¹, or butts, and at the wild duck and rabbits in the forest.

It was that same Guy of Warwick who got the markets for Sutton who was nicknamed the Black Dog of Arden by Piers Gaveston, Edward II.'s favourite, and who seized that unpopular courtier, and beheaded him on Blacklow Hill. Guy's son Thomas was made Warden of the Scottish marches in 1340, and Marshal of England in 1343. When Edward III. invaded France, Thomas landed at La Hague with one esquire and sixteen archers, drove back 100 Normans, and enabled the army to disembark. He was one of the principal captains at Cressy and Poitiers, those battles of archers, received for his services a pension of 1,000 marks a year, and was one of the original Knights of the Garter.

But the fortunes of the family culminated in Richard, grandson of Earl Thomas, who kept joust in London against all comers at the coronation of Queen Isabella of Navarre. Earl Richard's life seems just a tale of high romance—his capture of Glendower's banner, his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, his fight with Sir Pandolph Malacet at Verona, his feats of arms at Venice and Jerusalem, and Russia and Germany, his tournament at Constance, when the Empress took his badge off his knight's livery and pinned it on her dress, and the story of the three shields he painted with three

(1) The names still survive for crofts near Langley.

ladies' devices, and sent as challenges to the French King's court, which were accepted by the "Chevalier Rouge," the "Chevalier Blanc," and Sir Collard Fines, each of whom he defeated, wearing each time a different



Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, as a Pilgrim, worshipping at the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. From a MS. of Rouse's History of the Earl of Warwick, in the Cottonian Library (Engraved in Strutt's *Regal and Ecclesiastical Costume*).

coat of arms. The middle age seems "gorgeous upon earth again" when we read of his departure to take up his governorship of Calais "in his cote bete with fine gold," and in the ship with "the great stremour forty

yerdis in length and eight yerdis in bredth, with a grete Bere and Gryfon holding a Ragged Staff, and powdered full of Ragged Staves," and "the grete cross of St. George" on the other mast. At Calais he entertained Henry V. and the Emperor Sigismund, who told the King that "no other sovereign had such a knight for wisdom, nurture, and manhood, and if courtesy were lost it might be found again in him." He died at Calais in 1429. "His body with grete deliberaçon and full worshipful conduit by sea and by land was brought to Warwick," and the Beauchamp chapel there, that little gem of Perpendicular architecture, was built in his memory, at a cost of £2,481, a vast sum in those days.

They would be dull times in Sutton during these long absences of the Earls, and while all the men-at-arms and archers were away in the French wars. In 1419 Earl Richard let the manor house to Sir Ralph Bracebridge, of Kingsbury, in return for the service of nine lances and seventeen bowmen. Bracebridge also built the dam of Bracebridge Pool, under a lease for his life from the 7th year of Henry V.

Bracebridge Pool, like the Keeper's Pool¹, and most of the older pools, was made for the sake of the fish (so necessary for Lenten fare in Catholic times), and especially for the bream, of which people in those days were so surprisingly fond².

(1) Made by John Holte, ranger or keeper of the chase, in Henry VI.'s time.

(2) The stewes in which the captured fish were kept could be seen near Bracebridge dam till they were used as a tip for the rubbish of the railway.

According to Dugdale, Bracebridge agreed to pay for his lease a rent of £10 yearly or 120 bream, the price of each bream being reckoned at twenty pence. Dugdale adds this very curious extract from the accounts of the Earl of Warwick's steward in 32 Henry VI.

"Item, John Benbage and Will Lempe for fyching on Wednesday next before the Exaltacion of the Cross and did take ii. brems and were lade to my Lord to Lychefelde by Will Alyn ; and to the sede fychers hyre, mans mete and hors mete, iiis.xd.

"Item, the same fychers were send for againe on Thursday next after the Exaltacion, and was ther Thursday, Frydaie, and Satyrday, and tok four brems ; ther hyre and ther costs iiis. viiid. Item, the cost of bakynge the sede iiis. brems in flowre viid. Item, in Spys, Pepyr, Safurn, Clows and Synamun, vid. Item, the coste of carying the seyde iiis. brems to Mydham to my Lord in the north contrey, by Thomas Harys of Sutton, xs."

Altogether a very expensive dish when a fat ox cost sixteen shillings, a goose threepence and eggs were twenty for a penny.

There is a quaint love story, recorded at this time, of which Sir Ralph Bracebridge's grand-daughter was the heroine. Alice Bracebridge, of Kingsbury, and John, the son of Arden of Peddimore and Park Hall¹ were the lovers, but the father Arden, for some unrecorded reason, refused his consent. Whereupon Bracebridge, touched by his daughter's tears or angry at the slight upon himself,

(1) Park Hall was another house on the Arden estate near Castle Bromwich.



Bracebridge Pool.

gathered together his retainers and surprised Park Hall one morning before anyone was up. He carried off the not unwilling John and kept him at Kingsbury till, on the intervention of the neighbours, Arden agreed to the marriage, and Bracebridge promised him the best horse on his estate to make friends. The story ended happily. John and Alice went to Court, and gained high honour there, and before he returned to Sutton John was Lord of the Bedchamber to Henry VII. John's younger brother, Robert, went to live at Wilmcote, near Stratford, and became the grandfather of William Shakespeare. John's will has been preserved and some of the directions for his funeral are worth quoting as a picture of the times—

“ Item : Twelve poor women of my tenants to have each a black gown, hood, pair of bedes, fourpence and a dinner, to bear each a torch about my hearse.

“ Item : About my hearse to be twenty-four tapers, $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of wax in each.

“ Item : Every month's day during the year to be sung a solemn dirge, and on the morrow a masse of requiem for my soul and all christian souls. At each dirge and masse 3s. 4d. to be bestowed among priests and clerks, ringing and lights.

“ Item : My best gown of black damask to my parish church of Aston¹ to make a cope withal.”

The line of the Beauchamps ended in the son of Earl Richard and the earldom descended to his daughter's

(1) Park Hall is just outside Sutton parish, and was then in that of Aston.

husband, Richard Nevil, the Last of the Barons of Lytton's romance. Those were the times of the Wars of the Roses, when the English nobles so obligingly impoverished and killed each other to the ultimate benefit of the middle classes. The lord of Sutton began the



In Pool Hollies Wood.

wars with his archers at St. Albans and ended the first part of them with his death at Barnet. To provide funds for his last battle, says Leland, Warwick came to Sutton and felled and sold large quantities of timber and no doubt impressed into his army all the able-bodied

men that were left. He finished on the losing side, and after his death the Manor House and chase were deserted and afterwards forfeited with the rest of his estates to the King. The town itself had also fallen on evil times, many of its sons had been killed in the wars, the great house of Warwick, the chief source of its prosperity, was ruined, its market and fairs were deserted and partly discontinued, and the Manor House itself, long empty, was used for a short time as a home or, perhaps a prison, for the widow of the Kingmaker,¹ and was finally dismantled in Henry VIII.'s time, and the woodwork sold for the erection of Bradgate Hall in Leicestershire.

(1) NOTE BY MR. JOSEPH HILL.

The closing years of the life of Anne Beauchamp, Countess in her own right, of Warwick, the widow of the Maker of Kings, and the last of her noble and illustrious line, have a close connection with the Manor and Manor House of Sutton. After her widowhood (1471), the whole of her vast estates were grasped by the Royal husbands of her two daughters, and she was left to seclusion and abject poverty. In 1487-8 Henry VII., by a special Act of Parliament, had the whole of her estates reinvested in her, solely that she might convey them to him by deed, which deed was signed at Beaulieu Abbey, where she was living in obscurity. This enforced surrender by the Countess comprised 118 manors, and in return the king graciously permitted her to retain one manor, presumably one of her own choosing, for the few remaining years of her life. The manor selected to form this example of Royal meanness was the beautiful town and park of Sutton Coldfield, which would be far dearer to her than the military fortress at Warwick.

We are told by historians that the broken-down Countess left Beaulieu Abbey and went north, where is not recorded. North, however, was an ordinary designation for Warwickshire; but she was old and poor, therefore where she lived, or how long after the death of her royally-mated children, or where she died or where buried, were all matters of small importance; yet, curiously, we find that the old manor house which stood so delightfully was upheld for a few years, and that the Chapel of St. Blaize within its walls was given to John Harman. That John Harman was a most eligible person to control the movements of a Countess who had been great and might yet be dangerous—and when his keepership came to an end, and



The Pine Wood in Nuthurst.

the body of the lady of three score years and ten had been brought to the earth, and the king exercised ownership over Royal Sutton (all which appears to have been about 1499), John Vesey was not forgotten at Court.



Moor Hall Farm, Vesey's Birthplace.



Bishop Vesey's Monument in Sutton Church.

CHAPTER V.

BISHOP VESEY.

ABOUT the year 1452 there was born, at a small farmhouse to the north of Sutton, a boy who was to form another of the links which so strangely, from century to century, have brought this little village on the Coldfield in touch with the great world of England, who was to restore all its waning prosperity, and give to millions of unborn men and women the priceless inheritance of Sutton Park.

John Harman was the eldest of four children of a yeoman of Sutton, who died when John was eight years old. Of how this little family of orphans struggled to manhood we know nothing. Their uncle, or, at any rate, their namesake, was a priest of the chapel of St. Blaize, within the castle walls ; but he could not have helped them much out of the salary of 39 shillings a year which was attached to that office. Tradition says that John assumed the name of Vesey in gratitude to the man who educated him.

It is certain that in 1482 he became a scholar of Magdalen College, Oxford, and a schoolfellow of the famous butcher's son, Thomas Wolsey. And a most distinguished scholar he proved himself. In five years' time he was made a Fellow of Magdalen and a Doctor and Professor of Civil Law. In 1489 he became attached to the household of the Queen, and began to learn the trade of courtier, in which he was to become so proficient. Vesey steadily advanced from Vicar-General of Lichfield, 1498, Vicar of Coventry, 1507, to be Dean of Windsor in 1515, and tutor to the Princess Mary in 1516. Preferments and pluralities now came thick and fast, and culminated in the appointment of the poor yeoman of Sutton to be Bishop of Exeter in 1519.

Those were the early days of the Reformation, when men burnt each other in the name of Christ, and suffered martyrdom for what they thought was truth.

But no fiery zealot was Bishop Vesey. A man of the world, an opportunist, a sixteenth century Bishop Blougram, he accepted the orthodox faith as he found

it, and instilled it into his royal pupil. But he himself was no more capable of Mary's passionate loyalty to the Papacy than of the martyrdom of Cranmer or Latimer. He agreed to the claims of Henry to be head of the Church instead of the Pope, acquiesced in his confiscation of the Church property and the suppression of the monasteries, and submitted to the seizure of the Exeter endowments by the King's favourites.

But Vesey had little enthusiasm for the new order of things, for another bishop, Miles Coverdale, the translator of the Bible, was associated with him at Exeter, and he himself resigned the episcopate in the third year of Edward VI. He retired to Sutton, where he had built himself a house—Moor Hall—on the land adjoining his father's farm, and lived there in the stately mediæval fashion, served by a band of 150 men in "scarlet caps and gowns." He died there suddenly in 1555, at the great age of 103¹.

It must be admitted that by following the line of least resistance at court, Vesey was able to do for his own people at Sutton and their neighbours an amount of practical good, accumulating from century to century, that would put to shame nine out of ten bishops that have ever lived.

Vesey found Sutton a decayed village, he left it a prosperous little country town. He conceived and carried out at Sutton, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, ideas of municipal government that are only now being applied in the great cities at the beginning of

(1) According to the inscription on his tomb, written in 1748. It is thought that 95 would be the more correct age.

the twentieth. He did himself the work of all the different committees of a modern corporation—of the Highways Committee, when he paved the town with



One of Vesey's Stone Houses.
At Little Sutton.

stones, that lasted till quite recent years, repaired the roads in the neighbourhood, and built two fine bridges over the Tame at Water Orton and Curdworth, using the stones from the ruined manor house—of a Housing

and Health Committee, when he built for the poor people the fifty-two substantial stone houses, several of which are still inhabited—of a Watch Committee, when he built guard-houses in the outlying districts, and put some of his men in them as police.¹ He re-established the Markets and Fairs in the town. He built the Moot Hall, and repaired and enlarged the church. As a Guardian of the Poor, before Poor Laws were thought of, he found vagrants work on the roads, and tried to



Water Orton Bridge.

introduce in Sutton the weaving industry, which he had seen so prosperous in the West of England, by supplying the townsmen with looms and people to instruct

(1) Roughley Cottage was one of these, built to control the people of the Muffin's Den, or the Ruffian's Den, as it was then called.

them in their use. Vesey also was an educationist—he built on the edge of the churchyard, and richly endowed, the Sutton Grammar School. He even suggested perhaps the first technical school in England, for in his original grant he stipulated that “if a learned layman to teach grammar might not be had, some lay artificers” should be engaged to teach their trades, “so that the inhabitants might live more happily.”

But of all the good Bishop's benefactions the greatest, and the one which must always make his name venerated throughout the Midlands, was that wonderful experiment in municipal socialism, the gift of Sutton Park to the people. One wonders whether his friend Sir Thomas More suggested it, or whether he himself conceived an idea so many centuries in advance of his time.

In 1528, at the height of his prosperity at court, just before he accompanied Henry to his meeting with the King of France, Vesey obtained from his master a grant of all the forfeited property and rights of the Warwicks at Sutton. Instead of converting them to his own use, as he might so easily have done, he advised the King to bestow them on a body of trustees to be held in trust for the benefit of the people. These trustees were to be nominated in the first instance by himself and the townsmen, but afterwards they were to have power themselves to fill up the vacancies in their number. Thus was constituted the “Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield,” and although the plan worked so badly in practice it was probably the only one possible in those days when popular

ignorance was so great and unselfish public service in local affairs was so little known.

It is pleasant to think that although the Bishop may have been seventy years old even then, he should yet have lived on for another thirty years of honoured old



Woodmen.

age to see the results of his munificence and wisdom in the prosperity and happiness of his people at Sutton.

The following is a summary of the famous *Royal Charter of Sutton Coldfield*.

“ Henry VIII. unto our well beloved liege men inhabitants and residents within our town of Sutton



Blackroot Glade.

Coldefield, otherwise Sutton Colvyle or Coldefylde, that henceforth they be one body incorporated of one warden and society of the same town for ever,

the town and village *to be called the Royal Town of Sutton Coldefylde*: the same men to be called the warden and society of Sutton, and to have power to purchase under that name and have a common seal.

William Gybons¹ to be the first warden. The Corporation to build a Mote Hall in which the inhabitants of this lordship, men of the age of 22, shall convene and choose out of themselves twenty-five good and honest men of which the warden shall be one: thenceforth from year to year on the 2nd of November, after divine service, to elect one of themselves to be warden for the year.

The warden to take an oath of allegiance and just administration, and that he will take care that true weights and measures are in use: and that vagabonds be duly corrected and that no such persons shall have a voice in the elections: and that he will take care that the *profits of the land, &c., be distributed in exonerating the poor from the subsidies of the King, or for the building of houses in the lordship, or for the marriage of poor girls, or some pious secular use.* The other members on election to take oath to assist the warden. The full number to be made up by the election of a majority on or before every 2nd of November."

(1) Vesey's nephew.

The charter goes on to revoke the grant to Sir William Devereux of his office of park keeper "with free fishing of all the pools," and to Sir H. Willoughby of his office of Steward of Sutton and "Master of the toils of the Park," and to Sir L. Wyndwood of the "farm of the herbage of the Park," and grants to the Warden and Corporation "to hold all the great liberties anciently appertaining to the lordship in fee farm for ever."

The warden, &c., to have power to purchase lands of the yearly value of £10.

The warden to be clerk to the market and fairs, no toll to be taken on our subjects resorting there.

"We give the society and inhabitants free warren in all lands, waters, &c., within the lordship. The warden, &c., may freely hunt, fish, and fowl there with dogs, bows and arrows, and other engines for deer, stag, hares, foxes, and other wild beasts."

Any person being willing *to build and inhabit a house* may enclose sixty acres of the waste contiguous to the house.

The warden, &c., to appoint a fit person learned in the law to be steward of the corporation and to hold the courts, who shall have full power as in our city of Coventry. They may have one or two sergeants-at-mace.

The warden to be coroner, so that no other coroner may enter in the lordship. The warden, &c., to make statutes and provisions in the town for the public good of the inhabitants.

Charles II. afterwards confirmed this charter (and charged for it). He added the privilege that the warden might "carry a white staff," and so hold the office of sheriff, and also the privilege of electing two members of the corporation to be "capital burgesses" with the powers of magistrates.



The Tudor Rose. Seal of the Old Corporation.



"The brook that brawls along the wood."



The old Malt House in High Street.
(Pulled down for the Midland Railway.)

CHAPTER VI.

SUTTON IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME AND MILTON'S.

IT is a pleasant picture—this little town during the next two or three centuries, surrounded by its commons and beautiful woodlands, clean, well paved, the quaint half-timbered houses round the church, Vesey's comfortable stone houses round about, the little grammar school perched on the edge of the cliff, the mill pool at the foot of the hill. It was a prosperous little town, too, for the people could subscribe for the

persecuted Piedmontese Protestants, whom Milton immortalized, £14 against the £15 11s. 2d. of Birmingham, and Charles I.'s Ship Money Tax produced £80 here against the £100 of Birmingham, and the £266 of Coventry.



A Spring.

One can fancy how Shakespeare would laugh at the idea of Falstaff and his ragged company straggling into this quiet place some evening from the Coleshill lane.¹

(1) *Henry IV. Part i., act iv., scene 2. A Public Road near Coventry.*

Falstaff: Bardolph, get thee before to Coventry. Fill me a bottle of sack: our soldiers shall march through; we'll to Sutton Cofil to-night.

For that is the way they would come, turning off the Coventry Road at Stonebridge, and rejoining the Chester and Shrewsbury Road at Banner's Gate or Little Aston, and sleeping in the little village, instead of being a laughing stock to the citizens of Coventry.

Shakespeare would know the road well, he would have travelled on it himself when he visited his relations¹ at Peddimore or Park Hail, or his friend, Edward Pudsey, at Langley;² and this little touch of local knowledge would be enough to prove that the creator of Falstaff was a Warwickshire man, even if there were no other evidence.

There is an inimitable picture of life in a place like this in *Love's Labour's Lost*. One might almost think those villagers were sketched at Sutton—Antony Dull, the one and only village constable, Jaquenetta and Costard, "who was seen with her in the manor house,

(1) Shakespeare was very proud of his well-born relations. He obtained permission to impale the arms of Arden on his own, and would almost certainly come to see the head of the family on this business, even if he did not commonly visit his second cousins as a natural thing. Mr. Christopher Chattock mentions in his "Antiquities" that there was an established tradition in the family that Shakespeare did, in fact, so visit them.

(2) Langley was the next house to Peddimore on the north. It was this Pudsey to whom the Corporation granted Langley Mill Pool, at a nominal rent, in 1604. (See p. 72.) There exists a manuscript book of his containing extracts from Shakespeare's Plays, with variations from all known editions, and also additional passages not appearing in published versions, and even passages from an unknown play, which he attributes to Shakespeare, called "Irus." This note-book has been published by Mr. Richard Savage, librarian of Shakespeare's birthplace, who suggests that Pudsey must have known Shakespeare, and been shown by him the manuscripts.

sitting beside her on the form, and taken following her into the park, which put together is in manner and form following." Sir Nathaniel might be Roger Elliot,



Mistress Barbara Eliot, d. 1606, the Parson's wife in Shakespeare's time.
(From the Brass in the Church.)

the parson of that day ; and Holofernes, the Grammar School master, who "educated youth at the charge house *on the top of the mountain or mons, the hill,*" might so easily be the teacher of Robert Burton.¹

(1) The famous author of "The Anatomy of Melancholy," who was a scholar at the Sutton Grammar School about the year 1586.

whose pedantic euphuism, with its tag of Latin in every sentence, Holofernes so exactly caricatures in advance.

Those were the days of the Renaissance, the grand intellectual revival of the sixteenth century. The



Josias Bull, gent., d. 1621.
(From the Brass in the Church.)

enthusiasm of the scholars for the new learning was followed by the great religious movement of the seventeenth century, which led to the struggle for liberty, and to the Civil War.



Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, High Steward of Sutton in 1619.
From a picture formerly at Drayton Manor, afterwards at New Hall, and
now in the possession of Mrs. Tonks, of The Rookery, Sutton.

Sutton was mildly Puritan in those days. The High Steward of the Corporation was the Earl of Essex, who lived at Drayton Manor and was the Commander-in-Chief for the Parliament at the beginning of the War. The Pudseys of Langley assisted at the demolition of Stafford Castle by the Parliament. The advowson of the church was owned by one John Shilton, a Puritan mercer of Birmingham. And the rector himself was a certain Antony Burges, a Puritan divine of considerable repute, who afterwards preached before the Lord Mayor and the Houses of Parliament, and was employed by the Commonwealth as a Warwickshire commissioner "for the ejection of scandalous, ignorant, and inefficient ministers and schoolmasters."

We can see him in the pulpit at the old church in his black silk gown with the enormous sleeves and big white collar, the newly translated Bible before him, preaching his long sermons Sunday after Sunday on the 17th chapter of St. John. People listened earnestly to sermons in those days, and also read them, and Burges not only preached 145 sermons on that chapter, but published them afterwards in two massive folio volumes, and followed them with two more folios on the 1st and 2nd chapters of Corinthians.

Sutton watched with absorbed interest the progress of the great struggle between King and Parliament, the little battles in the district and the passage of the troops along its quiet roads.

On the 12th September, 1642, there was a desperate fight at Curdworth, and the King's men forced their

way over Vesey's narrow bridge to relieve the garrison at Kenilworth, besieged by Lord Brooke, of Warwick, and the citizens of Coventry. A month later King Charles stayed at Aston Hall, and the next day reviewed his Shropshire adherents on their way to Edgehill from the little mound or tumulus near Banner's Gate, still called "the King's Standing."

On the 27th February, 1643, Lord Brooke and his army marched along the Coleshill Road, past Bassett's Pole to besiege Lichfield when, as Scott says,

"fanatic Brooke

The fair Cathedral stormed and took,"

—and was himself shot, with one of those curious old flint-locked long barrelled guns, by a man stationed on the central tower.

In April, 1643, Prince Rupert set out to punish that "abominably and desperately wicked town of Bromwicham" (as Clarendon called it), because it had made and supplied swords to the Parliament, but refused them to the King. With his trained troops he defeated the townsmen at Camp Hill, pillaged the town, burned eighty houses, and then part of his army passed through Sutton on their way to Lichfield. Burges had fled to Coventry, but we can fancy his followers glowering and peering behind their shuttered windows at the blood-stained troopers as they clattered over High Street cobbles with their booty on their saddles.

Cromwell himself was in the town with some troops on the 29th of August following, and wrote a letter from here, still extant, to a Captain Eyre, at Wolverhampton.



King's Standing Wood.

But Tamworth Castle had been captured by the Parliament in the June before, and the war was over in this part of the country.

Afterwards came the Commonwealth, and the Restoration and the Act of Uniformity. Sutton, far from the madding crowd, became quite a little harbour of refuge for the Puritan divines who were unwilling to accept it. Burges was one of these first Nonconformists, though he was offered the bishopric of Hereford if he would remain in the Established Church. John Ley, the Puritan vicar of Solihull came here, and so did John Ray, F.R.S, another Puritan, and the original proposer of the Linnæan system of classification. And there were others, enough to form a little Presbyterian community, which was licensed here in 1672.



The Maypole.



"Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."



New Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WARDEN AND HIS FELLOWSHIP.

AFTER the war Sutton settled down to a long period of rest—"happy," perhaps, that its "annals were uneventful." Only now and then there came rumours of the doings in the world outside, as when the thousand baggage wagons of William III.'s army deepened the ruts of Chester Road on their way to Ireland—or when Dr. Sacheverell, after his famous trial for high treason, came to stay with his kinsman at New Hall, and preached in Sutton Church to the two hundred Jacobites from Birmingham, who went back and burned down the Old Meeting House there.

For the rest a little thing would interest the quiet town, and was found worthy to be recorded in its parish register, as, for instance, in 1668 :

"Buried Elionor Clibbery widdy : also William Clibbery son of the s^d Eleonor : Both brought to their graves together (who were both of y^m drowned in a pytt in goeing into a pytt to ffetch out a gosling as it was credibiely reported)."

Or again in 1677 :

"Buried the wife of John Norris of Four Oaks being the sixth wife."

And in 1678 :

"Married John Norris unto ffelis Dibble she being the seventh wife which he hath hadd."

Or the flood of 1668 which

"ffloed over the stone wall at the further end of the dam, by reason of the sudden Rayne, which did breake down Wynly-poole Dam and also Brass-bridg poole dam."

The gentlefolk of Sutton never seem to have done anything very distinguished after the war. Perhaps the only item of interest about them, in those days, was the amazing marriage of Jane, the widow of the last of the Pudseys, to the sculptor whom she had engaged to carve the monument of her husband. This man, William Wilson, was not only a sculptor, but an architect, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, and the designer of the beautifully proportioned tower of St. Mary's Church at Warwick. But the Sutton squires laughed at Jane's taste in leaving a moated hall to marry a "stonemason."

Wilson explained that he could afford a moated grange too, and built the fine Queen Anne house with the sundial in the High Street, still called the Moat House, though the moat has disappeared since 1860.



The Pudsey Monument in Sutton Church.

But during all these years and for long afterwards the gentry of the neighbourhood did well for themselves with the revenues of Vesey's lands, and elected each other, with neighbourly fairness, to share the spoil.



The Watercress Brook.

Writing in 1645, Dugdale says:—

“How long these trustees continued jealous for the good of the school I cannot affirm; perhaps while the Bishop lived. Sure I am that to such a height of covetousness they did in time grow, that to prevent the Schoolmasters from enjoying what was justly due to them they contrived to elect them of the Corporation before they could be acquainted with their right, so that having made leases of their land to their children or friends, for small rents received, it should not be in the Schoolmaster’s power, being so bound up as one of that body politic, to question the same. Thus was the pious intent of the well-meaning founder abused, till that the fraud was discovered and remedy had, by a chancery decree, at the prosecution of John Michael, then master of the school, Lord Coventry being keeper of the seals.”

But before this the members of the Corporation had been in trouble over their peculations. In 1577 Bracebridge Pool was granted away to a Sutton tailor. In 1581 William Taylor and other inhabitants complained that the trustees had appropriated 600 or 700 acres of land to their own use at a rent of only twopence per acre, and employed the revenue of the park to their private use. Like Justice Shallow, they made a Star Chamber matter of it. But they got little satisfaction out of the Commission that was sent down, and the speculation went merrily on. In 1604 Langley Mill Pool was granted in perpetuity to Edward Pudsey by

G. Pudsey, the Warden, and the Corporation for 5s. a year ; other encroachments were made, and in 1617 one Robert Blakesley appealed to the courts again and preferred



‘Don’t beat me, but if you will you may.’—*Tristram Shandy*.

some damning charges against the Corporation, among others that it had received £10,000 for its unholy bargains without employing it according to the Charter

The Court again decided largely in favour of the Corporation. Poor Blakesley himself was mulcted in heavy costs for molesting the Corporation, the Court suggesting that he had an axe of his own to grind. But whether this was the case or not, we should always remember him with gratitude, for the Court did affirm that cottages erected inside the Park since the death of the Bishop should be pulled down on the death of the tenants, and the land enclosed restored to the common. The numerous ditches still to be seen near Rowton's Well may be referred to these early encroachments, which must have been very extensive indeed.

John Michael's suit about the school property had better success, and the Chancellor ordered that the property should be taken out of the hands of the Corporation and given to a body of trustees, thirteen at least of the "honest and sufficient inhabitants within twenty miles of Sutton." This trust has managed the estates for two centuries and a half.

But the Corporation went on granting away its manorial estates to its friends at peppercorn rents, and in 1697 it gave the Lyndrich Pools to W. Jesson, of Langley, at a rent of 3s. and *six bottles of wine to the Warden*—a beautiful touch which introduces us pleasantly into the eighteenth century, among the wigs, the cocked hats, the hoops and the powder, and the people who live for ever in the pages of Tom Jones, when the whole of the Sutton Corporation records were destroyed by being kept in the deputy-warden's wine-bin,

and when the commander of the King's forces on their way through the parish to Culloden got so drunk at the Bradford Arms that he forgot his sword next morning, and afterwards gave an annual dinner there in memory of that whimsical circumstance. But in those days the noble lords and gentlemen who so seldom went to bed sober held almost absolute power, the country was governed by the landed aristocracy for the landed aristocracy, and the iniquitous Enclosure Acts were passed.



A forgotten boundary.



The old road.



A gravel pit.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUTTON UNDER THE FOUR GEORGES.

PERHAPS the stage-coach is the feature of English life which one sees first in the picture of the times of the Georges. Before those days people travelled on horseback, after them there was the railway. But from Roderick Random and the Spectator, to Pecksniff and Pickwick, everybody started on their adventures by coach. And what a contrast there was between the first coaches and the last, between the funereal box which Spectator rode in, swaying on its huge leather springs, and the dashing Flying Machines and Tally-hos of the Regency!

It is announced in Walker's Birmingham Paper of April 12th, 1742, that :—

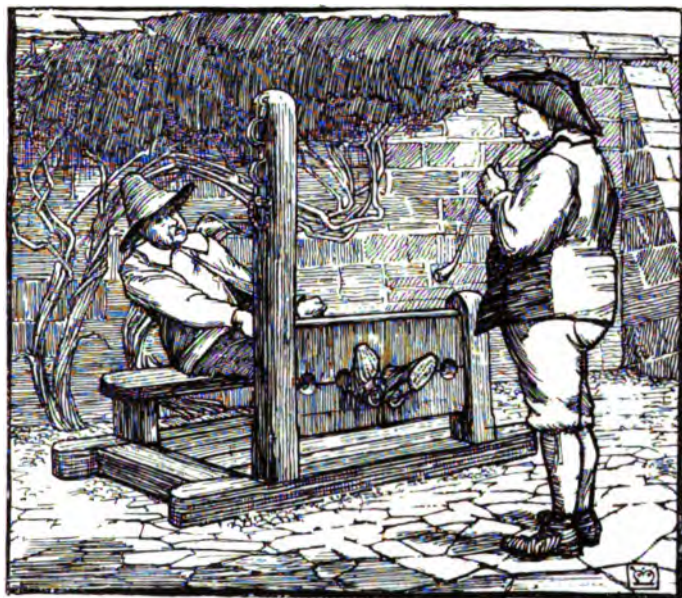
“The Litchfield and Birmingham Stage Coach sets out this morning (Monday) from the Rose Inn, at Holbourn Bridge, London, and will be at the House of Mr. Francis Cox, the Angel and Hen and Chickens, in the High Town, Birmingham, on Wednesday next, to dinner, and goes the same afternoon to Litchfield, and returns to Birmingham on Thursday morning to breakfast, and gets to London on Saturday night, and so will continue every week regularly, with a good coach and able horses.”⁽¹⁾

We can imagine this old black leather coach, with its enormous draped boot in front and its immense projecting basket behind, its little oval windows bordered with brass nails, its three heavy horses with the postillion in cocked hat and green and gold coat on the leader. We can see it doing its three miles an hour up the long rise of the Erdington lane, a foot deep in ruts, and the “guard” cocking the blunderbuss on his knee as it crept over the Coldfield heath, and past the Wild Green, in the dusk of the wintry afternoon.

For an evil repute was attached to the Coldfield from time out of mind. Dugdale records that one Elias-le-Collier was robbed of £300 by some of Robin Hood's friends on the Ridgeway of Sutton (the old Chester Road) as long ago as Edward I.'s time, and sued the Hundred of Hemlingford for the money. At Pipe

(1) “Old and New Birmingham.”

Hayes there is a field still called the "Bow-bearer's Croft," where two retainers of Earl Warwick were stationed to conduct travellers over the lonely heaths. And in the palmy days of coaches and highwaymen the



The Sutton Stocks and Whipping Post.¹

Coldfield lived well up to its reputation. Tom King, the friend and rival of the immortal Turpin, was born here at a farmhouse between Sutton Park and Stonnall, and many are the stories of the highwaymen of the Coldfield which are written in the fascinating pages of

(1) Now in the yard of the Council House. They would make an interesting feature at the Park gates.

Aris's Birmingham Gazette. On October 1st, 1750, for instance :—

“ On Wednesday, Mr. Henry Hunt, of this town, was stopped on Sutton Coldfield, in the Chester Road, by two highwaymen, who robbed him of his watch and money ; but on Mr. Hunt asking them to give him back some silver, the highwaymen returned him six shillings, and immediately rode across the Coldfield and robbed another gentleman in sight of him, and then rode quite off.”

Their thoughtfulness and courtesy was the highwaymen's greatest charm, as one finds again in this story of May 6th 1751 :—

“ On Tuesday last the Shrewsbury Carravan was stopped on the Chester Road, between the Four Crosses and the Welsh Harp, by a single highwayman, who behaved very civilly to the passengers, told them that he was a tradesman in distress, and hoped they would contribute to his assistance, on which each passenger gave him something, to the amount, in the whole, of about Four Pounds, with which he was mighty well satisfied ; but returned some half-pence to one of them, saying he never took copper. He then told them there were two other collectors on the road, but he would see them out of danger, which he accordingly did.”

These collectors often came to an end tragic in its suddenness. On the 18th May, 1742, for instance, the *Gazette* says :—

“ The noted Sansbury and his Accomplice, who have

infested these roads, were taken, being drunk and asleep in the Standing Corn."

The "noted Sansbury" was hanged as soon as the legal forms had been attended to. Gibbett Hill, where Oscott College now stands, gained its name from the last scene in the life of a man who had robbed a London mercer on the Chester Road, and had a cart pulled from under him there in 1729. The name of Gallows Brook, at Middleton, suggests its gruesome story, and there was another gibbet on Little Sutton common, described with weird details in "The Adventures of Mr. Wildgoose."

Nobody's virtue was over-nice

When Walpole talked of a man and his price.

But the people who "stole the commons off the goose" had better luck than the highwaymen; the social history of England in those days is largely the record of the enclosure by the landlords of the commons in their neighbourhood, and the Sutton Corporation went on granting away its land to its friends.

In 1754 it leased to Joseph Oughton for 1,000 years the Stonebed Moors and Holland Pool. In 1757 it granted to Edward Homer and Joseph Duncombe (his uncle, the Warden) permission to make Blackroot Pool under a forty-two years' lease at 2s. for the fifteen acres.¹ And in the same year it let to Simon Luttrell forty-two acres of the Park to add to his Four Oaks estate on a perpetual lease at £12 a year² (thirty-five years later

(1) Good meadow land in those days let here at a guinea an acre.

(2) But this was done by Act of Parliament, apparently with the consent of the inhabitants.

this land was sold with fifty-eight acres more, and the house, for £12,000). And in 1735 Longmoor Pool was made by John Riland and John Gibbons—the dam is said to have cost only £7 to build. The author of the description of Sutton by “An Impartial Hand” complains that :—

“ It has happened that vast quantities of timber have been sold and disposed of, and many of the vallies which are by far the most valuable part of the waste land have been granted away by the body corporate to several of their own Aldermen and members for the making of pools and other purposes.”

These later pools, unlike the earlier fishing pools, were made for the water power for the mills attached to them. Holland Pool mill was used for the grinding of gun-barrels. The pool which is in the enclosure now just inside the Park gates worked an edged-tool forge. Longmoor was a button mill. Blackroot was a leather mill, and the “Spade Mill” at Powell’s pool still exists, though it is now used for rolling steel for pens. An interesting paragraph may be quoted from “Incola’s” letter to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1762, referred to before.

“Some rivulets which take their rise in the Park feed several mills built in and near it, not only for the grinding of corn but for boring musket barrels, polishing metal buttons, making saws, grinding axes, knives and bayonets, and performing various other operations for the mechanical traders in Birmingham, who having had great numbers of their workmen impressed or voluntarily enlisted

into his Majesty's service during this war have set their invention to work to perform by mills many operations which used to employ more hands than can be procured in the latter end of a war when so many have been buried in Germany and Canada."¹



The old Spade Mill.

It is a very interesting fact that the enormous staple trade of Lancashire was born at Sutton, that what is claimed to have been the first contrivance for spinning cotton by machinery was invented and tried here long before the time of Richard Arkwright. In 1733 John Wyatt spun the first thread of cotton without the aid of human fingers at Sutton Coldfield by an arrangement of rollers in a small model

(1) Minden and Quebec.

"without a single witness to the work," the inventor being, to use his own words, "all the time in a pleasing but trembling suspense." The invention was tried on a practical scale at Birmingham, "an engine being fixed in a large warehouse near the Well in the Upper Priory, and turned by two asses walking round an axis."¹

This first cotton mill did not prosper, and was discontinued in 1742—probably the inventor and his partners were not business men ; but it is an honour indeed that in our little town should have originated one of the greatest of the world's industries. John Wyatt was also the inventor of the weighing machine for carts, which remains to-day almost in the form in which he left it.

There is a wonderful picture of the eighteenth century society at Sutton in Mr. Bedford's history of the Rilands of Sutton Coldfield. We seem to be again turning the pages of "Sense and Sensibility" or "Pride and Prejudice" when we read, in those delightful old-world letters, about the subscription for publishing "Daphne's" poem on the death of Ammon, about the quarrels for the best seats in the church, the venison dinners at the neighbouring halls, the awful "crime" of the man who tried to strike a lord, the affectionate jokes about Gretna Green, and the watchman crying the hours as he went his rounds. What pictures by Randolph Caldecott are suggested by the account of the disputes for permission to draw the park covers, and of the seven packs of hounds within five miles of Sutton, by the tale of the beautiful

(1) Sam : Timmins.

Ann Luttrell, of Four Oaks,¹ riding to the ball on a pillion behind her partner, and by the account of the funeral of a lady, with its three mourning coaches and six and the hearse and six.

There is a choice letter from the organist, who came



The High Street before the Railways.

over from Lichfield on Sundays, asking for a more regular salary. We can see him at the organ in his wig and rusty gown, while the nine "post-coaches" of the wealthy congregation wait in Coleshill Street, and his own horse is stolen from the stable and galloped about for an hour by

(1) Who afterwards married the Duke of Cumberland, so much to his father George III.'s wrath that he caused the Royal Marriage Act to be passed forbidding such unions.

the ostler's boy, who then "rode it to the watering place in Mill Street, and let her drink as much as she would, notwithstanding she was so exceeding hot, so that on the Tuesday she died." We can sympathize with the struggles—ended so long ago—of the poor musician who "had always taught the Piano Forte thirteen times for a guinea, and now goes to Miss Leadham's Boarding School three times a week for a guinea a quarter," and we marvel how he could come to Sutton so long without salary, paying every Sunday for "Horse hire, 2s. 6d. ; Horse keep and ostler, 8d. ; Dinner and ale, 8d. ; Missing the Cathedral, 5d. ; and dressing his hair, 3d."

And there is more human nature than punctuation in the letter of the lady who, towards the end of a long sentence about the division of some relative's property, goes on :—

"so I stayed till I knew Mrs. Holtes mind about the Lots and I am very much disappointed at her chusing the Lot marked A and sopose you will like the B lot if not I would have that but as you are the eldest you have the preference and then please send me the Lot C with the white Damask, and I should take it as a very great favour if the Dresden handkerchief is in the lot marked F which will fall to my sister Jesson will change it for a handkerchief out of mine as it is not named particularly dresding ; My sister will not know but it was in mine, and the Silk Mittings as was your own produck is not mentioned in the A lot and if I was you I would take them myself as you have the most right to I intended giving them to you if I had been so

Lucky as to have had the Muff; I grudge Mrs. Holte that sadley; pray change the Snuff Boxes out of that Lott and give her my two if they are not as good for changing is no Roberry. I hope you will not think I have been either unreasonable or unfair in the above named articles and please send Mrs. Holte's Lot and mine in the same box, and directed to Charles Holte, Esq., at Shrewsbury to be left at Mr. William Kempson's near the Chapel yard Birmingham by the Northampton carrier."

And, lastly, it is impossible to resist quoting this ravishing description of a lady whom the writer was recommending to his brother for a second wife:—

"He gives her a Great Charactr, commending her for her ffrugality, Chastity, Sobriety, Calmness of Temper, and Piety, She has everything yt is amiable, charming, and desirable in a Wife, being a Pfect ffund of Joys & Cornucopia of Pleasures, in a word yt I may show her, as it was in a Glass, she is exactly qualified honourabi to succeed the present Mrs. of Quenby. Her Education has been rural, having had the best Mastrs the Country affords to instruct her in Dancing, Singing, Playing upon the Guittr, Writing, Raising of Paste & Cookery, yt she might be entirely free from the Vanity & Vices, yt now reign in the City. She is an only Daughtr. Her Hair is ffair, and Person agreeable. She seems to be about 20 yrs of age. Her ffathr has lately presented her with a Coach, & can make her 1st and last a Ten Thousand

Pound fortune, if she marries with his approbation."

In 1778 Sutton Park passed through the greatest peril in its history. Sir Joseph Scott, of Great Barr, a member of the Sutton Corporation, proposed that an Act of Parliament should be promoted for the enclosure of all



"When Tom bears logs into the Hall."

the common lands of Sutton parish, *including the Park*, and for their division among the landlords of the neighbourhood, "in proportion to their interest in the soil." This scheme was supported by the rector of Sutton and

his curate, and by 87 of the landlords, but it was strongly opposed by the majority of the townsmen, and the much-abused Corporation passed a resolution that must always be recorded to its credit against so much on the other side. It resolved that the "design of applying to Parliament for a bill for enclosing the Park waste and common lands within the parish of Sutton is an unjustifiable attack on the undoubted rights and privileges of the Corporation, seems calculated to wrest from them their property and estate solemnly granted and confirmed to them by charter, and will tend eventually to dissolve their existence as a body corporate, that this Corporation will oppose such application in Parliament." This resolution saved the Park, and the scheme was withdrawn.

But the Corporation was seldom at peace with the people for long, and in 1788 the Lord Chancellor was appealed to by some of the townsmen who did not approve of its habit of cutting down the Park timber, and its methods of disposing of the proceeds. In 1792 the Court granted an injunction restraining the Corporation from selling more timber and impounding the proceeds of former sales. That lawsuit dragged along for nearly forty years, and by the end of that time a sum of over £40,000 of Sutton money had accumulated in the Chancellor's hands.

In 1813 Mr. John Riland, the rector of that day, a fine old gentleman ever mindful of the interests of his poorer parishioners, presented a petition from a

committee of the townsmen urging the employment of the fund for elementary schools. This proposal was afterwards supported by the relators in the lawsuit and by the master of the grammar school, which had been removed from the churchyard to its present site in 1727.

But it was not till 1825 that the proposals were sanctioned by the Court, and a large scheme was adopted for the founding of national schools at Sutton, Hill, Little Sutton, Walmley, and afterwards at Boldmere, also for the clothing of the poorer children and apprenticing them, for medical attendance for the poor, for erecting and endowing ten almshouses, and other benefactions.

Mr. John Riland, unlike his predecessor, was a determined opponent of the enclosure of the common lands. Mr. Bedford draws a fine picture of him, "with his bushy wig, flapped hat, and long cassock like coat, walking long miles over remote heaths or dirty lanes to the scattered hamlets which formed his charge, his pockets laden with comfits for the children, his mind stored with quaint sayings and simple doctrine for the edification of their elders."

But his opposition to the enclosure ended with his death in 1822, his cottagers were without a champion, and the landowners succeeded in passing an Enclosure Act for Sutton in 1825.

From this act the Park was mercifully excepted, but 3,500 acres of common land, an area greater than that of the Park itself, which was the property of the community as a whole, and had been used by the cottagers

from the time of the Saxons, was *conveyed* to the land-owners of the parish and divided among them as their freehold property. The principal beneficiaries under



The Rev. John Riland.

(By kind permission of the Rev. W. K. Riland Bedford.)

the act at Sutton were Sir E. C. Hartopp, of Four Oaks ; Sir Robert Peel, of Drayton and Langley ; Mr. F. B. Hackett, of Moor Hall ; Mr. W. H. G. Floyer, of Hints ; Mr. Chadwick, of New Hall ; Mr. J. Scott, of Great Barr ;

and the rector of Sutton. The Corporation received an allotment of 300 acres as lords of the Manor—*out of 3,500 acres of communal land.*

Not content with this great haul the landlords have ever since been encroaching on any land that may have been left at the side of the highways. It is impossible to walk along any of the country roads round Sutton without noticing the strips of land which have been thus pilfered from the public, and the practice even in the last few years has been continued in the quiet lanes.

In 1826 Sir E. Hartopp wished to add to his Park at Four Oaks the very picturesque sixty-three acres of forest called "the Ladywood," and offered the Corporation in exchange ninety-three acres of meadow land adjoining the Park Gates at Sutton and Boldmere, and also agreed to construct the direct road which now runs from Mill Street to the Park.¹ The Corporation accepted the offer, and although one is inclined to begrudge the loss of the beautiful wood, there is no doubt the town benefited by the exchange, as the thousands of happy children who have played on the Meadow Platt would testify.

In 1827 the road over the dam was raised and widened, and the fine turnpike road from Birmingham to Lichfield was completed. This became the chief road from Bristol to the North of England, and before the time

(1) Before that time the nearest way from the town to the Park was round by Manor Hill and Windley Pool.

of railways twenty-four coaches a day rattled through the Sutton streets at ten miles an hour, and woke up the sleepy borough with their horns.



The Old Entrance from the Saw Mill.



"When blood is nipp'd and ways be foul."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT ENCROACHMENT.

AN attempt was made in 1835 to include Sutton in the new Municipal Corporations Act. It was favoured by 300 of the inhabitants, but the old Corporation and its friends were too strong, and Sutton was excluded. Another attempt in 1855 met with the same fate, and that curious old self-elected anachronism continued to control the destinies of Sutton and its Park.

In 1845 the London and North Western Railway Company proposed a line from Birmingham to Lichfield—and to secure the consent of the Sutton Corporation it signed a bond agreeing to "make a line avoiding the park, under a penalty of £20,000." The company intended the comma to be placed after the word "line,"

but it somehow got into the wrong place, and when the company afterwards decided not to make a line at all the Corporation claimed the money, but eventually compromised for £3,000, which was spent in building the old Town Hall in Mill Street.

In 1860, however, the North Western Company did make a branch line from Aston to Sutton, and a good service of trains replaced the old omnibuses which used to be the only public conveyances to Sutton and took eighty minutes over the journey.

In July, 1868, occurred the great fire of Sutton Park, which decimated the beautiful and extensive Streetly Wood, and burnt over 500 acres of the Park.

In 1869 a pleasantly written history and guide to Sutton Park was published anonymously, which concluded with these wise words :—

“Long may the trustees of this unique nook of natural beauty take the same liberal view of their moral obligation in respect to its acres of wild scenery—not to regard them as a means of mere personal enjoyment, not to value them simply as a source of income, an adjunct to a charity estate ; but, remembering by whom and when they were granted, to look on them as a Royal trust and therefore a popular right, the legacy of ancient times to the toiling millions of our haunts of industry, to be handed down unimpaired to our posterity.”

Unhappily the trustees referred to did not see it in

quite that light, and two years later its greatest misfortune came to Sutton Park. The Midland Railway Company had long desired a connection between their system and the South Staffordshire coalfield, and in 1871 it proposed a line from Whitacre to Walsall straight through Sutton Park. Two alternative routes were offered, one, called the black scheme, by Blackroot and Bracebridge ; the other, equally loathsome, called the Red scheme, by Rowton's Well. A meeting was called to decide which route was the best. But the townsmen, who did not want a railway through the park at all, supposed that the Corporation would take the same course as in 1845, and before they realised the danger they found that the town was officially committed to the principle of a line through Bracebridge woods. The story of what followed was well told by the late Mr. A. W. Wills, of Wylde Green, brother of Lord Justice Wills, in a letter to the *Birmingham Morning News*.

After describing the breaking up, on the previous night, of a meeting of residents opposed to the railway by a gang of hired roughs from Birmingham, Mr. Wills proceeds :—

“ And now let me state, more explicitly than has yet been done, some facts of grave importance in the early stages of this affair, asking your readers to bear in mind throughout that :

(1) The solicitors to the Black, or present scheme, are Messrs. Sadler and Eddowes, of Sutton Coldfield, the latter gentleman being Warden of the Corporation.

(2.) The local agents to the Red line, since 'rolled up' into the Black scheme, were Messrs. Holbeche and Addenbrooke, solicitors, of Sutton.

(3.) The 'Deputy Stewards,' *i.e.*, clerks or legal advisers of the Corporation, are Messrs. Holbeche and Addenbrooke.

These last have published an explanatory letter, now before me, which I shall quote.

'On February 17th a special meeting of the Corporation was held to consider a memorial from certain inhabitants (opposing the bill), and Mr. Bedford and Mr. Beaton were invited to attend on their behalf.

At that meeting a resolution was passed 'that petitions be presented and counsel retained with a view to opposing the competing railways intended to pass through the park, in order to obtain the best accommodation for the town, and to watch over the interests of the Corporation as trustees of the Park.

The deputation expressed themselves quite satisfied with the resolution as fully expressing their views.'

Certainly, because from the whole tenor of the discussion at which they were present, they clearly understood that the opposition was to be a bona fide one on the principle of the bills.

Had they not distinctly understood this, it is manifest that they would at once have taken independent steps to oppose.

This interpretation of the intention of the Corporation was shared by most of that body if not by all.

If it be urged that the resolution was ambiguous it may safely be said that there was the more reason why a copy of it should have been furnished to the memorialists; but although the clerks were specifically directed to furnish such a copy, singularly enough they omitted to do so.

‘At the same time a committee was appointed to carry out the resolution, and on the 21st February draft petitions were submitted, approved and ordered to be presented.

At a subsequent meeting, held on the 4th of March, there arose a difference of opinion respecting the nature of the opposition, and Mr. Addenbrooke submitted the case in consequence to Mr. Clabon.’¹

It would be interesting to know the terms in which the case was submitted, inasmuch as the opinion of counsel usually depends mainly upon and corresponds to the manner in which the case is placed before him, and as the memorialists took occasion to represent to the committee, it was questionable whether a gentleman, occupying the double position of legal adviser to the Corporation and local agent for the line since ‘called up’ into the present scheme, was so far above the frailties of common human nature as to be precisely the proper person to conduct this part of the business.

It is hardly surprising to learn from Messrs. H. and A. that finally, at a meeting on the 12th of March, *two days before the bills went into Committee* :

‘The bills were ordered to be opposed for clauses only.’

(1) A London barrister.

Now I come to the main point—"the constitution of the committee" (the railway committee of the Corporation).

"It consisted of two members in favour of the construction of a line through the Park and two as strongly opposed thereto, presided over by Mr. Eddowes,



By the railway at Blackroot.

Warden of the Corporation and solicitor to one line, advised legally by Mr. Addenbrooke, Deputy Steward of the Corporation and local agent to the other scheme, since abandoned, and its forces transferred to the support of the extant proposal."

After explaining that Mr. Eddowes was known to him as an honourable gentleman, but that he was in a false position, Mr. Wills proceeds :—

“ As a final resource, Mr. Bedford made a formal application to the committee to be heard as a witness. It was moved and seconded that he should be presented as a witness before the Parliamentary Committee. An amendment was moved and seconded that he should not be so presented. The chairman put each proposition to the meeting ; the votes were equally divided, and the chairman, whose sense of honour, of course, forbade him to vote, pronounced that *the proposition fell to the ground through equal division of votes.*

“ Now, I venture to assert that, as a matter of business, the constitution of this committee was simply monstrous and without parallel, and that it rendered its action nugatory, futile, and, in fact, a mockery.

“ We contend that it is wholly by reason of what we cannot but call a breach of faith on the part of the Corporation and its committee that we lost our *locus*, and our fair opportunity for a hearing for our side of the case.

“ I leave the public of the entire district to judge if we have not reason to complain of our treatment, and merely add that of the many false assertions that have been made as to our purpose, none is so false as that we desire to prevent free railway communication to the park for the whole district.

“ We should all profit by it alike ; but until we can be persuaded that an embankment 990 yards long across a

much-frequented and most picturesque part of Sutton Park will be, as we are asked to believe, an 'improvement to the scenery,' or anything but an irreparable injury to its beauty ; and until we are convinced that the needful railway communication cannot be obtained without traversing the park at all, we shall not relax in our efforts to obtain that opportunity of putting the promoters on their proof, which has hitherto been denied us.

A. W. WILLS.

"Wylde Green, March 31, 1872."

But the bill had already been passed by the Committee of the House of Commons, and although Mr. George Dixon, and some other local members, made a strong appeal on the third reading, the House refused to re-commit the bill.

A strong agitation against the bill was raised at Birmingham ; a Town's-meeting, presided over by Mr. George Dawson, protested against it ; a committee was formed there to oppose it in the Lords, at which *Councillor* Chamberlain appealed for the money so necessary there, "as they could not approach the aristocracy without a considerable outlay of funds."

But the promoters of the bill got together a meeting of the cottagers at Sutton, men whose only knowledge of the park was that they pastured their donkeys there. It was presided over by Mr. Boddington, an eccentric Sutton doctor, and urged on by a cry of cheap coal from the Black Country, it passed a resolution approving of the bill, although the opponents pointed out that if the railway company could only be prevented from going

through the park it would soon find a way round it.

The Rev. E. H. Kittoe, of Boldmere, a member of the Corporation, proposed to that body that it should oppose the bill in the Lords. He was supported by Dr. Johnstone, Rev. M. Webster, Messrs. S. S. Lloyd, J. D. H. Chadwick, G. Browne, and J. Clive. But he was opposed by Messrs. J. Wiggan, J. Dutton, R. Rochford, H. Smith, E. Jenkins, H. G. F. Shaw, T. S. Wilkins and Dr. Boddington, and defeated by a majority of one vote.

Sutton should never forget the gallant fight for the integrity of her Park that was made by Mr. Bedford, the late rector, by Mr. Kittoe, Mr. Beaton, Mr. Wills, Dr. Johnstone, and many other gentlemen of taste in the town. But it was a forlorn hope from the first. The "Manchester School" was supreme at Westminster in those days, the railway interest was stronger even than it is now, and the men who had ruined the noblest city view in the world with Charing Cross Bridge would not think twice about the desecration of a provincial park, which was agreed to by its legal guardians. The bill was passed, a strip of land *nearly two miles long* was sold to the Company for £6,500, and the dreadful scar was cut across the fair face of Sutton Park.

This extraordinary story naturally incensed very much a large section of the people of Sutton against the Corporation, and they were still further exasperated by its refusal to have anything to do with the control of the drainage, which was becoming a serious question in the growing town.

But the conservative instincts of a country community prevented any immediate change, and it was not till the passing of Sir Charles Dilke's Corporations Bill in 1883 that the old Warden and Society finally got themselves abolished. A new municipal charter was obtained in 1886, and Sir Benjamin Stone presided to everybody's satisfaction over the reformed Corporation for the first three years of its reign.



The Bower.



Pool Hollies Brook.



Sutton Church from Mill Street.

CHAPTER X.

SUTTON TO-DAY.

THE Corporation.—The population of Sutton has increased from 4,662 in 1861 to 8,686 in 1891, and 14,264 in 1901. The town is now governed by a properly-elected Corporation, consisting of eighteen councillors and six aldermen, which controls an annual expenditure on the needs of the town of nearly £17,000, of which only £445 is derived from the Corporation estates—the charity estates not being included.

The Corporation has carried out an efficient system of drainage in the borough, at a cost of £50,000, and last year installed a municipal electric light plant at a capital expense of £32,000, but unfortunately the townsmen

have not yet thoroughly appreciated the advantages of this beautiful light. Altogether £120,000 has been borrowed for public works in the town, £40,000 of which has been repaid.

The old Town Hall, in Mill Street, was found too small for the needs of the growing town, and the buildings of the old Royal Hotel were last year bought for the public offices at a cost of £10,000. Heavy expenses are incurred for sanitation, highways, technical education, and all the complicated needs of a modern town, and though the rates of Sutton, like those of all other towns, are increasing, most people recognise that efficiency must be paid for.

The Church.—The most interesting building in the town is, naturally, the old Parish Church, whose early history has been sketched in preceding chapters. It was largely rebuilt by Bishop Vesey, who added the two choir aisles in 1533. The picturesque coats of arms which he carved on their walls (his own surmounted by his royal master's, and supported by the Tudor greyhound and dragon) are used to decorate the cover of this book. Vesey built in the uninteresting late Tudor style of his day, and this style was copied when the church was restored by the Corporation in 1758, with funds raised by the sale of Park timber.

The church has not escaped the great restoring mania of our own day, which has swept away nearly all the ancient buildings of the country, and very little now remains of the old work at Sutton. When that mania was at its worst, all the fine Jacobean woodwork was turned out of Worcester Cathedral, and the place

thoroughly refurnished in the "Gothic style." The late rector, Mr. W. K. R. Bedford, was fortunate in securing this old work, and he installed it in Sutton Church by the side of the fine Queen Anne pulpit already there.

Most of the monuments of interest have been illustrated earlier in the book, but all lovers of Sutton should make a pilgrimage to the tomb of the good bishop. His monument was reconstructed by the Corporation in 1748, the long epitaph added, and the whole enclosed in a wrought iron railing. This was again altered at the last restoration of the church, and the railing formed into the gate of the porch. But the effigy itself is original; it is supposed to have been carved in the bishop's lifetime, represents him in the full episcopal dress of his earlier years, with alb, dalmatic and chasuble, mitre and crozier, and is a good specimen of the severe and decorative, if somewhat characterless, sculpture, of the Tudor period.

The vestry is entirely surrounded by the old worm-eaten records of the numerous charities and doles connected with the church. Of these the most interesting, perhaps, is the Wilkins bequest, in 1707, of the croft called the "Bible Land," the rent of which has ever since been given to the distribution of Bibles and prayer-books to the children of the town on the 23rd of October.

The banner of the Sutton volunteers should be noticed under the western arch of the nave. It was consecrated in 1797, and is embroidered with their motto, "Loyal, Firm, and Free." The tower contains a peal of eight most musical bells.

In the churchyard there is a quaint 17th century sundial and some curious tombstones, including that of Mary Ashford, a girl who was outraged and murdered in 1820, at Penns, and whose supposed murderer escaped punishment by challenging his accuser to "trial by combat" under an old law, which till then was unrepealed.

There are district churches at Boldmere, Hill, Walmley, and Maney. There are Catholic, Congregational, and Wesleyan chapels in the town, and a most artistic little Wesleyan chapel has just been completed at Four Oaks.

Oscott College, on the Chester Road, is a very important seminary for Catholic ecclesiastical students. It was built by Pugin in 1839. Cardinal Newman preached there one of his most famous sermons—"The Second Spring." It contains a very interesting collection of works of art.

The Sutton Charities.—In 1882, by order of the Charity Commissioners, £15,075 of the money which came out of the Court of Chancery in 1825 was handed over to the Governors of Vesey's Grammar School. The balance, which now amounts to £20,753, together with estates which now produce an income of £2,000, was given, on the extinction of the old Corporation, to a body of "Trustees of the Municipal Charities of Sutton Coldfield."

Last year (1903), £1,300 of this money was given towards the support of the Sutton elementary schools,¹ and the rest to the several "pious secular uses" which have been designed in the spirit of Vesey's Charter. £350 was

(1) Now transferred back to the Corporation under the Education Act.



The Druids Well.

given for the clothing and doctor's fees of the town children (though perhaps the Bishop would not have liked his children's dress to stamp them as "charity boys.") Twenty-two almshouses have been built at Sutton and Walmley, and £340 was last year contributed to the support of their aged inmates. Gifts of blankets and medical help to poor women absorbed £50. Vesey's "Lord's Meadow Charity," for the annual gift of £2 to poor widows of Sutton, accounted for £36. Of the "Jesson Charity," for the apprenticing of town boys, only £12 10s. seems to have been wanted for that purpose out of an income of £38. And lastly, £96 was given as marriage portions to four Sutton maidens.

There are a few free scholarships for the town boys at Vesey's Grammar School. The governors would probably be willing to establish more, but the condition of six years previous attendance at one of the elementary schools of Sutton seems to be prohibitive, and only two or three are applied for.

Sutton Park.—The Park is administered by the reformed Corporation in a spirit quite in keeping with modern ideas of public service. The Park Committee seem to realise their responsibility as trustees of one of the noblest public possessions in the Midlands, and would no more think of making a dividend-earning concern of it for the ratepayers than the Crown would of Hyde Park or Richmond. Still, they consider that the expenses of its management should be principally borne by the hundreds of thousands of visitors who come to it every year.

Last year the expenditure on the Park amounted to £2,185, and the revenue to £2,348. Of this sum £1,500 was paid for admission by 293,769 visitors, £27 10s. was paid by 154 burgesses for the depasturing of 326 animals, £270 was paid for gravel, &c., and £244 was repaid to the Committee by the Golf Club for labour expended on the links.

The Park is managed by an able and experienced Forester and a staff of 24 keepers, under the supervision of the Borough Surveyor. Their aim is not to make of it a formal and artificial suburban park, but to preserve and enhance the wonderful loveliness which nature has given it of rich woods, embowered pools, and glorious open moorland.

Hollyhurst, the nearest to the town, and one of the most beautiful of the woods in the park, has been ravaged for some years by the oak blight, which is caused by a small moth called the *Tortrix viridana*. The Park Forester, in an able report on the condition of the woods, which he presented to the committee in 1899, suggests that the blight may be largely due to the numbers of jays, magpies, hawks, and crows, which prevent the multiplication of the small birds in the park, the birds which live on those insects. The harsh croak of the jay can be heard everywhere in the woods, but there are comparatively few of the beautiful little singing birds.

And few and far between are the flowering plants in the park. If the thousands of people who every year hunt for, and take away, every flower they can find, would only bring with them a pennyworth of common

wild flower seeds, and plant them in likely places, the park might become a veritable fairyland in the spring and summer months.

A great deal of valuable work has lately been done in clearing the brushwood from the roots of the trees, and berried holly is given away at Christmas to any burgesses that apply for it. But some of the woods are still covered with a dense undergrowth of holly, and, if one might venture on a small criticism from an artist's point of view, one would like to suggest that much of it might, with advantage, be cut down and sold at Christmas—not the grand old clumps of great holly trees, which are among the most beautiful features of the park, but the low bushes which give such a sombre colour to the woods, and spoil so many of their beautiful vistas.

From the same point of view it might be said that the very proper efforts to preserve the woods for future generations, by planting young trees in all the open spaces, sometimes deprive us of the beautiful glades to-day. And one is tempted to wish that some of these young trees were given to help on the splendid work which the committee has begun of planting a belt of trees on each side of the railway. Everyone must wish for the success of this work, which offers the only hope of restoring that part of the park to something like its ancient beauty.

A strong belt of trees has recently been planted round the park fence, between the main gates and Wyndley, which will effectually preserve the beauty of the entrance, when the Crystal Palace grounds are given

over to the jerry builder. A few years ago, in a similar far-sighted way, a belt of trees was begun along the west and north borders of the park, in continuation of the old "Warden's Belt." But this has been discontinued for



A Holly Wood.

the last two or three years, perhaps for lack of funds. Lovers of the park must hope that the stop is only temporary, for by the time the trees were grown, even if the threatened colliery does not come, there will

certainly be a large town at Streetly, which will sadly mar the landscape in that part of the park.

Carriage roads traverse the park from the main



Hollyhurst Glade.

entrance to Boldmere, Banner's Gate, Streetly, Four Oaks, and Hartopp Road, and another is being made from Boldmere to join the Streetly Road. They are, of course, quite essential to give old people and invalids their share of the park, but they form ugly scars in its

wild beauty, and it may be hoped no more will be necessary.¹

Sutton Park is beautiful at all seasons of the year, but most visitors come to see it at midsummer, when, perhaps, it is less lovely than at any other time, when the wicked and thoughtless people have strewed the ground with paper, and the woods are coloured with their most sombre green. Sutton's truer and wiser lovers come when the hawthorns are white on Rowton Hill and the Bower, and the crab trees blaze against the greening woods. Or they come in late September, when the moor is one vast flame of purple heather, chequered with the golden masses of gorse. And long after all the trees are black in the suburbs of Birmingham, summer lingers in Sutton woods, and never are they more beautiful than on some fine November afternoon, when the low sun tinges the gnarled branches, the lichen-covered trunks, the scattered yellow leaves, and dying bracken, an ever-varying harmony of purple, green, and gold.

It would be useless to try to describe any special walks in the Park, all are beautiful. Only it might be said that the further afield one goes the lovelier pictures one will see, and the edges of Westwood Coppice and Little Bracebridge Pool are even fairer than the woods and commons near the gates. If they were more accessible the boggy places at the back of the pools, especially Black-

(1) The Committee have successfully resisted, so far, a shocking proposal to drive a carriage road from the Four Oaks entrance across the end of the Gum Slade and round the most beautiful side of Bracebridge Pool, which would irretrievably vulgarize the gem of the whole Park.

root, would be found more charming still, and if the swampy little wood on Longmoor Brook could be added to the Park, and a path formed along the dotted line on the map it would be quite the most delightful walk of all.

Except for the railway all views in Sutton Park are beautiful, but there is one which can only be described as grand. Everyone who has been to the Park knows it. Everyone who has wandered through the glades of Hollyhurst, delightedly looking down the dim vistas under its "high embowered roof," has drawn a deep breath of the strong wind as he came out on to that glorious open heath and stopped to admire again that great sweep from Tyburn to the Beacon, lighted up by the sparkling water of the big pool at his feet. But in a few years, the hillside at the back of that pool will be "ripe for building," villas will be built along its edge, and the noblest prospect near Birmingham will be utterly ruined.

Many thousands of pounds were subscribed to preserve to London the view from Richmond Hill. Is it too much to hope that it may be possible to secure those three fields before it is too late? The land would still be let for farming, an extra penny toll on two or three days a week would pay the interest on the purchase money, and very few of the people who came to Sutton on those days would object to pay it if they knew that the money was needed to preserve one of the chief glories of the Park.

Royal Sutton, fortunate, perhaps, more than any other town, has her Park for her grand inheritance,



A Woodland Beauty.

a free gift from the greatest of her sons. The encroachments and indifference of four hundred years have shorn it of some of its loveliness, but it still remains unsurpassed, perhaps unequalled in its gentle beauty. We may hope and believe that the unborn millions of our ever more and more densely peopled land will look back with gratitude to the men who hold to-day that beauty in trust for them.



Longmoor Brook.

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